

Creative Translation in the Classroom and the Stephen Spender Prize

During the school year 2019-20 one of our translator-facilitators partnered with a Year 5 teacher at a primary school, as part of our new Creative Translation in the Classroom programme. The school has a high number of speakers of English as an Additional Language (EAL); numerous pupils at socio-economic disadvantage; a need to develop writing skills and confidence; low motivation for Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) amongst teachers and pupils; and difficulty engaging some boys in reading and creative writing.

The translator underwent our training programme in summer 2019, developing innovative classroom materials for German and Arabic. At our training day at Waddesdon Manor in October 2019, she met her partner teacher for the first time, and the pair began to develop plans for the classroom delivery. The 'creative multilingual' approach was new to the teacher, who noted that she could imagine it working particularly well with 'reluctant readers'.

In November 2019 the teacher-translator pair gave a day of workshops to two Year 5 classes at the school. Following a multilingual warm-up which had all the pupils drawing 'multilingual monsters' (see picture), they worked together to translate a German picture book into English, using the pictures as guides, mobilising their inference and prediction skills, and learning to use a German>English glossary. Following this live interaction with the translator, the teacher developed a follow-up project: for the pupils to produce their own picture book in English, inspired by the German original and with the same structure, use of rhyme and style of pictures.



Although this project was interrupted by the closure of schools during the Covid emergency, the teacher plans to continue it with the same class next year. She spoke very highly of the programme as a whole, highlighting the literacy, cognitive and social skills it fostered, as well as the very high levels of enthusiasm and aspiration that it generated amongst the pupils:

“The children perceived this as a discovery; something entirely new. They were puzzled at first, but quickly rose to the challenge and became very engaged. They were aware that they were **doing something that they hadn't thought possible** [translating from German!].”

“The translation exercise was very collaborative; it required the pupils to listen to each other and to try out ideas together. They learnt that there can be more than one 'right answer'.”



Other teachers on the programme made similar remarks:

“The multilingual warm-up was a great way of highlighting the bilingual skills of our EAL pupils, regardless of language. It gave them the opportunity to show off, to be proud of their heritage and to share it with others.”

Case Study: Stephen Spender Trust

“The pupils had never met a translator, had never considered the role. By the end they felt they were all translators, that it was accessible to all of them.”

If Covid had not intervened, the translator would have returned twice to the school in spring/summer 2020, to assist with the follow-up creative writing activity and to run an internal Stephen Spender Prize, encouraging the pupils to read poems and translate independently. In the event this was delivered virtually, with virtual translation resources accessed via the ‘Translation for Beginners’ section of our new resources hub multilingualcreativity.org.uk.



The partner teachers’ enthusiasm about the prize mirrored the response that SST received nationally for the 2020 prize. The number of entries doubled compared to last year, with 1320 overall of which 1000 were from under-18s. The vast majority of entries were in the 14-and-under category, reflecting our focus on that age group. Teachers’ feedback highlighted the particular value of this virtual activity during school closures:

“The Stephen Spender Prize could not have arrived at a better time. As we language teachers devote ourselves to searching for new ways to engage our students from afar, I am thrilled to be getting my students involved in a creative activity which will take them to the heart of what it means to communicate between different languages. Now more than ever, at a time when other cultures may be less accessible physically, poetry translation has the power to guide students into other worlds, lives, and experiences.” (Katrina Barnes, MFL teacher, Comberton Village College)

I knew of the Stephen Spender Prize for Translation, but never really considered it as something that was relevant for me or my students. But then I heard Charlotte Ryland talk about the work she and her team are doing with schools and how they engage with teachers like me and students like mine. It was an eye-opener!

What a find! What a way to engage my learners with the language I love!

What a way to keep them going in these difficult times!

(Eva Lamb, MFL teacher in a large inner-city secondary school in Sheffield)

“A student who translated a Turkish poem found the experience particularly special, because it connected her to her father’s culture and language. All the students spoke about what an enriching experience it had been.”

(Gabi Reigh, winner of Stephen Spender Prize 2017 and Sixth Form English teacher)

This enthusiasm has been reflected in the numbers accessing our new virtual resources, with 6,000 views of our YouTube channel and 8,500 page views of our resources hub in the first three months after their launch (mid-April to mid-July 2020).